Wood County Dartball League celebrates 70 years

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Dartball might not appear on Sports Center or the local evening sports broadcasts, but it is safe to say that it’s been a popular sport in Wood County for some time.

The Wood County Dartball League recently celebrated its 70th anniversary at the league banquet last month. The league actually dates back even further than 70 years.

“They didn’t have the league during World War II,” said Steve Bockbrader, who served as the league’s president this year. “The first (league) banquet was in 1938.”

One of the league members, Wayne Young of Luckey and a member of Salem Lutheran Church, has been a member of the league since the late 1940s. “Some of these guys are amazing,” league member Tom Davidson said.

The league consists of 12 teams from 11 different area churches and is open to any denomination. Church of the Nazarene, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches are represented in the league.

The teams come from Bowling Green, Luckey, New Rochester, Pemberville and Stony Ridge. The season typically starts in early fall and goes through early spring, finishing with a round-robin tournament for all of the teams.

The league plays on Monday nights at 7:30 p.m. “There are anywhere from 8-17 players on each team.”

“Nine players play on each team each night,” Bockbrader said. “You can play with five, but then you have two automatic outs. With six players, you have one automatic out, and with seven there is no penalty. You play three games a night and you can sub whoever you want to. It’s a lot of fun.

“I have no idea how many people are involved with this, but I know they play clear up in Minnesota.”

Bockbrader, who plays for the New Rochester team, said he began playing in 1963.

“A friend of mine, his dad got us to come to church and play and we’ve been playing ever since,” he said. “I’m just a fair player.”

The strategy is the same as baseball played on a diamond, except that a dartball is used. You can hit a home run, triple, double and single.

Darren Pash, of Pemberville Methodist, led the league with a .363 batting average. He received a trophy at the league banquet, as did the RBI champion, Rick Nelson, who had 84 RBI playing for Zion Lutheran in Luckey.

Each league member has his or her reason for playing in the league, but most will tell you it is because of the fellowship.

“I like meeting all the different guys, the fellowship,” Bockbrader said. “Not so much the winning, but getting out and meeting people from other denominations. It’s a lot of fun and it’s competitive. Sometimes a team will be down a little bit and come back.

“Our church, New Rochester St. Paul Lutheran, won the tournament last year. Miracles happen once in a while.”

Davidson has been a league member for three years.

“It’s the participation and fellowship with all the people more than anything,” he said. “Someone asked if I wanted to play dartball and I tried it. It’s definitely the fellowship.

“They take it seriously — lots of harassing. When you’re up to bat, you get a lot of chatter.”

The league’s age range this season included younger teens and players in their 80s. “Some kids played this year, even some women,” Davidson said. “I’m 73 and I know there are a lot older (players) than that. There are some guys who have been in this forever.”

This year’s banquet was held at St. John Lutheran Church in Stony Ridge.

Pete Hebler steps to the line for Zion in the Wood County Dartball League championship playoff with Cloverdale. The Wood County Dartball League is over 70 years old. (Photos courtesy of Mark Kunstmann, Tom Davidson and Ken Finley.)

More than 135 people showed up. Mike Harbour was selected as the league’s new vice president, and Jerry Charles moved from vice president to acting president of the league.

Rick Nelson, a resident of Luckey, started a website for the league, called www.freewebs.com/wcdarts.

For more information on the Wood County Dartball League, call Jerry Charles at 419-872-1289.